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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1998-1999

Office accommodation at the Palais Wilson

Fifth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions considered the report of the Secretary-General of 14 November 1997 on office accommodation at the Palais Wilson in Geneva (A/C.5/52/19). The report seeks the concurrence of the General Assembly for the acceptance of the proposal of the Swiss Federal Council to place at the disposal of the United Nations office accommodation at the Palais Wilson. During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. As indicated in paragraph 3 of the report of the Secretary-General, the building would be provided rent-free, initially for the period from 1998 to 2000, with the intention of maintaining that arrangement indefinitely. Under the proposal, the building would be managed by the Fondation des immeubles pour les organisations internationales, which would be responsible for building and technical service installations (maintenance, renovation and repairs). The United Nations Office at Geneva would be responsible for the payment of those services, at the fixed rate of SwF 78 (or approximately $54) per square metre per year, until the end of the year 2000. The Advisory Committee was informed that it was anticipated that this maintenance fee of SwF 78 would remain constant for the first five-year period of occupancy. However, beyond the fifth year, it was expected that certain technical installations might have to be overhauled and, consequently, an increase of 5 to 10 per cent in the maintenance fee was expected during the second five-year period of occupancy. The Advisory Committee requests the Secretary-General to indicate in his next report how this maintenance fee compares with commercial maintenance rates for such services at similar locations.

3. As indicated in paragraphs 21 and 23 of the report, the total cost of the move to the Palais Wilson for the biennium 1998-1999 would amount to $6,050,000, of which $3,920,000 ($2,990,000 for a number of one-time costs and $930,000 for maintenance costs) would be covered by the Swiss authorities and the balance of $2,130,000 from resources of the United Nations. The Advisory Committee was informed that, on 1 December 1997, the Swiss Federal Council had decided to release an amount of SwF 4 million for the financing of the one-time structural costs referred to above. A breakdown of the one-time and the recurrent costs is provided in paragraphs 7 to 20 and in the table in paragraph 24 of the Secretary-General's report. The Advisory Committee notes (para. 23) that no additional resources are requested for the biennium 1998-1999, but that the recurrent costs associated with the maintenance and operation of the building would be included in the provisions of the proposed programme budget under section 27F, Administration, Geneva.

4. With regard to the agreement with the Swiss authorities, as indicated in paragraph 3 of the report:

> "This agreement is yet to be established to take into account practical and other arrangements regarding the proposed move of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Palais Wilson, which is still under discussion with the Swiss authorities."

The Committee was informed that the Office of Legal Affairs of the Secretariat had reviewed the model lease agreement used by the Fondation des immeubles pour les organisations internationales and that it was anticipated that the United Nations comments and observations would be accommodated by the Fondation in the final text of the agreement.

5. As indicated in paragraph 4 of the report, the Palais Wilson contains sufficient space for the office accommodation and conference space needs of the Office of the High Commissioner; moreover, it is anticipated that the building could be occupied by mid-April 1998. In that connection, the Advisory Committee sought clarification and requested information on the current office space of the Office of the High Commissioner and requirements foreseen in 1998-1999. The Committee was informed that the office space to be released by the Office of the High Commissioner at the Palais des Nations was about 3,000 square metres (see annex I). Information on the overall space that would be available to the United Nations at the Palais Wilson, as provided to the Committee, is shown in annex II. In this connection, the Committee notes that an analysis has not yet been made of the space requirements of the Office of the High Commissioner in relation to the overall space to be made available at the Palais Wilson. In preparing this analysis, the Committee believes that the possibility of accommodating other United Nations units should be explored specifically.

6. The Advisory Committee notes that the proposal includes the provision of conference facilities and related equipment at the Palais Wilson, amounting to $1.5 million (A/C.5/52/19, para. 7). As indicated in the table in paragraph 24 of the report, such costs would be met by the Swiss authorities from the amount of SwF 4 million, mentioned in paragraph 3 above. The Committee notes that a conference room currently exists with a capacity of 100 to 120 places. Two additional conference rooms are proposed at the Palais Wilson for conference

requirements of the Office of the High Commissioner (one with a seating capacity of 100 to 120 places and the other with a capacity of 60 to 80). It is envisaged that, because of space considerations, the two additional rooms would operate via remote interpretation from the Palais des Nations (para. 7).

7. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in connection with its examination of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, it was informed (A/52/7 (Chap. II, Part VI, para. VI.11)):

> "The Secretary-General estimated a total of 1,488 meetings of intergovernmental organs. The Committee points out that the human rights programme has given rise to a complex intergovernmental machinery. It is the view of the Committee that the time has come for the Commission to come up with a more pragmatic meeting programme for the various subcommissions, committees and other groups and that consideration should be given to holding some meetings every other year instead of annually."

Under the circumstances, the Advisory Committee believes that there is a need for further analysis in connection with the proposal to build additional conference facilities at the Palais Wilson. In the Committee's view, it should be demonstrated that the conference facilities at the Palais des Nations would remain fully utilized and cost effective.

8. The move to the Palais Wilson would increase the space available at the Palais des Nations. According to the Secretary-General, this, in turn, would enable the rationalization and consolidation of existing operations within the Palais des Nations or the Geneva Executive Centre and, thereby, the closure of the Petit Saconnex annex (A/C.5/52/19, para. 4). The Committee was provided with information on the current occupants of Petit Saconnex and their foreseen places of relocation (see annex III).

9. As indicated in paragraph 22 of the report, the proposed move to the Palais Wilson would be accompanied by the closure of the Petit Saconnex annex. The resources originally intended for the Petit Saconnex location would be utilized to cover the costs related to the Palais Wilson. The estimated amount to be transferred in this regard would be $705,000 for the biennium 1998-1999. It was not clear to the Advisory Committee whether the proposed move of the Office of the High Commissioner to the Palais Wilson was the result of a careful cost-effective analysis or if it was due to the offer from the Swiss authorities, or both.

10. In the Committee's opinion, there are many elements of the recurrent costs that need further explanation and rationalization. For example, the Committee does not believe that the previous "shuttle bus" arrangements between the Petit Saconnex location and the Palais de Nations should automatically be transferred to the new location at the Palais Wilson at a cost of $100,000. Similarly, the services of an audio (conference equipment) technician could be provided within existing resources if it is determined that there is not a need to build additional conference room facilities at the Palais Wilson (see para. 7 above) and, in general, the costs of maintenance, renovation, repairs and cleaning ($1,195,000) appear high.

11. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 21 and the table in paragraph 24 of the report of the Secretary-General that the costs to be covered by the United Nations for the biennium 1998-1999, amounting to $2,130,000 (see para. 3 above), are to be absorbed through redeployment of existing and projected United Nations resources and contributions from extrabudgetary operations occupying the space vacated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Committee points out, however, that not all extrabudgetary sources and potential new tenants who will occupy the space released by the movement of staff of the Office of the High Commissioner to the Palais Wilson have been identified.

12. Taking into account its observations in paragraphs 4 and 7 to 9 above, the Advisory Committee is of the view that many elements of the proposal remain to be completed. The Committee therefore recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General and, bearing in mind the needs of the Organization and cost effectiveness, encourage the Secretary-General to continue his negotiations with the Swiss authorities with regard to the offer of the Palais Wilson and to report to the Assembly for a final decision.

ANNEX I

Space released by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Location/floor	Surface area (Square metres)	To be occupied by	Rent
Building D/Ground floor/basement	324.30	United Nations Compensation Commission[a]	[a]
Building D/1st	344.50	United Nations Compensation Commission[a]	[a]
Building D/2nd	344.50	United Nations Compensation Commission [a]	[a]
Building D/3rd	331.70	United Nations Compensation Commission [a]	[a]
Building D/4th	344.50	Joint Inspection Unit	Free
Building D/5th	344.50	Joint Inspection Unit	Free
Building A/5th	451.30	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research	Free
Building A/8th	409.80	Free[b]	-
Building C/5th	133.60	Free[b]	-
Total	3 028.70		

[a] As indicated earlier, the United Nations Compensation Commission will pay rent and reimbursement towards utilities and other costs.

[b] Occupancy to be determined.

ANNEX II

Proposed use of space at the Palais Wilson

Description	Square metres[a]
Office space to be occupied by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	4 200
Conference rooms - ground and first floors	550
First basement - storage, few offices	1 200
Second basement - maintenance and technical areas	1 200
Four small meeting rooms/delegates lounge - ground floor	320
Entrance hall - ground floor	270
Cafeteria - ground floor	240
Corridor space, stairways and security - all four floors and ground floor	2 000
Toilets and technical/maintenance installations - all floors	250
Total	10 230

[a] Approximate figures.

ANNEX III

Current occupants of the Petit Saconnex annex

Services	Surface area (square metres)	Responsible for relocation	Relocation to	Relocation costs borne by[a]
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development	960.3	United Nations Office at Geneva	[b]	Free
United Nations Institute for Training and Research	565.2	United Nations Institute for Training and Research	Geneva Executive Centre	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service	164.0	United Nations Office at Geneva	Palais	Free
Department of Humanitarian Affairs	1 115.5	United Nations Office at Geneva	Palais[c]	Free
Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations	147.6	United Nations Office at Geneva	[b]	Free
International Computing Centre	16.4	International Computing Centre	[b]	International Computing Centre
Council of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council	62.7	Council of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council	[b]	Council of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council
International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction	393.6	United Nations Office at Geneva	Palais	Free
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	419.1	United Nations Office at Geneva	Palais	Free
Department for Development Support and Management Services	344.4	United Nations Office at Geneva	[b]	Free
Statistics Division	131.2	United Nations Office at Geneva	[b]	Free
World Federation of United Nations Associates	196.8	United Nations Office at Geneva	[b]	Free
Information Systems Coordination Committee	196.8	United Nations Office at Geneva	Palais	Free
Electronic Services Section	98.4	United Nations Office at Geneva	Palais	Free
General Services	95.8	United Nations Office at Geneva	Palais	Free

[a] It is the understanding of the Organization that as regards relocation costs indicated as "Free", the move from Petit Saconnex to the United Nations Office at Geneva will be considered in the same context as the move from the United Nations Office at Geneva to the Palais Wilson, which is to be borne by the Swiss authorities.

[b] Still to be determined.

[c] Subject to restructuring of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.